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ABSTRACT

Increased public interest in education is attracting students and career-changers to the teaching profession. This ERIC Digest is organized into questions and answers dealing with teacher preparation: (1) What do teachers do? (2) What are working conditions like? (3) What academic preparation is needed; (4) Do I take courses after I receive my teaching credential? (5) Is admission to a teacher education program automatic when admitted to a 4-year college? (6) What courses are taken in a teacher education program? (7) How do I find teacher education programs? (8) How do I choose a teacher education program; (9) Where can I obtain financial aid information? (10) After completing the teacher education program, am I eligible to receive a credential? (11) Are there other ways to become certified? (12) Where can I find information on various State requirements? (13) Are there national teaching requirements? (14) If I meet the requirements in one State, can I teach in another? (15) How do I locate jobs? and (16) What is the demand for teachers? (LL)

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ERIC DIGEST

SO YOU WANT TO BE A TEACHER

ERIC Clearinghouse on Teacher Education

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ERIC CLEARINGHOUSE ON TEACHER EDUCATION

So You Want to Be a Teacher

Increased public interest in education is attracting students and career-changers to teaching. A skillful teacher can inspire, motivate, stimulate, and develop the minds of students. He or she must be well educated; be able to work with a diversity of students, parents, and other teachers; and be highly competent in presenting subject matter.

What Do Teachers Do?

Along with teaching classes, teachers at all levels must also prepare lesson plans, grade tests, hold conferences with parents, coordinate with other service-providing professionals, and attend school meetings. Some elementary teachers have specialty areas, such as music, art, or physical education, and teach only that subject to different classes. Generally, a secondary teacher is prepared to teach at least two specific subjects. All teachers must be able to evaluate student performance.

Through school reform efforts, teachers are becoming more involved in site-based management responsibilities. Experienced teachers may also mentor new teachers and/or supervise preservice teachers.

What Are Working Conditions Like?

Most states require schools to be in session for a minimum number of days, usually in a 10-month schedule with a 2-month vacation. Proposals for extending the school year to 12 months are now being considered. Salary levels generally have risen, and most states have laws that grant teachers tenure (job protection) after 3 years of successful teaching. Many teachers belong to either the National Education Association or the American Federation of Teachers, two professional teacher unions.

Class sizes and characteristics of students vary greatly. Preparation for working with students from diverse racial, ethnic, cultural, economic, and language backgrounds, and physical abilities is important.

What Academic Preparation Is Needed?

All states require teachers in public schools to have at least a bachelor's degree. High school guidance counselors can help in selection of classes required for college admission; graduates can then enroll in a 4-year college or in a 2-year college followed by transfer to a 4-year institution. The 4-year program will include student/practice teaching.

Some states may require a 4-year liberal arts program followed by 1 or 2 years of education courses, including an internship or student/practice teaching.

Teacher education programs are usually coordinated with state requirements for certification.

Do I Take Courses After I Receive My Teaching Credential?

Many states require that teachers eventually obtain a master's degree, such as a Master of Education (M.Ed.), which requires at least 1 year of course work, emphasizing study in a particular subject area.

Is Admission to a Teacher Education Program Automatic When Admitted to a 4-Year College?

Generally, students are required to wait until their junior year of college to apply for admission to a teacher education program. Entrance requirements usually include personal interviews, 2 years of arts and sciences courses, a minimum grade point average, and tests. Some schools do permit students to take education courses during their freshman year. Two-year college students should check with the admissions counselor at the 4-year institution to which they will transfer to assure they are taking courses that will be accepted for credit toward graduation.

What Courses Are Taken in a Teacher Education Program?

Required courses generally include professional education courses, such as the history and psychology of education; methods of teaching; teaching a specific subject area; and student teaching in an elementary or secondary school classroom.

How Do I Find Teacher Education Programs?

The following are good sources: *Barron's Index to College Majors* (Barron's Educational Series), *The College Blue Book, Degrees Offered by College and Subject* (Macmillan and Co.), *Index of Majors* (College Entrance Examination Board); and *Peterson's Guides*. The National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) publishes an annual list of accredited schools, colleges, and departments of education. For high school students, consulting with a guidance counselor is also helpful.

How Do I Choose a Teacher Education Program?

There are several considerations:

- If you want to teach in a specific setting (urban, rural, or suburban school), think about choosing an institution in that area. It is likely that field and student teaching experiences will be in the local schools, providing an opportunity to assess and evaluate them in terms of your personal likes, dislikes, and goals.
- Think about what size college or teacher education program would be most comfortable for you: there are advantages and disadvantages to weigh for different sized institutions; for public and private schools.
- Verify with the state department of higher education that the teacher education program has state approval and is accredited by a national or regional accrediting body.
- Ask about opportunities to observe different classrooms and schools in order to see a variety of teaching and

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school situations to distinguish factors that determine successful teaching and learning.

- Ask if cooperating teachers (full-time elementary or secondary teachers) are assigned to work with student teachers or if they volunteer. Usually a cooperating teacher is assigned to work with student teachers based on his/her experience and ability to coordinate schedules and subject area.

Where Can I Obtain Financial Aid Information?

Every college or university has a financial aid office that can be contacted for assistance. For information about federal programs, call 1-800-433-3243 or write to Federal Student Aid Programs, DEA-85, Pueblo, Colorado 81009. For state assistance, contact the state scholarship agency in the capital city. You may also consult *Scholarships Fellowships & Loans* (Gale) for private scholarship programs, *Peterson's Annual College Money Handbook: A Guide to College Costs and Financial Aid*, and *The College Cost Book* (College Entrance Examination Board).

After Completing the Teacher Education Program, Am I Eligible to Receive a Credential?

You need certification from the state where you will teach. Each state has its own specifications for approved teacher education programs or the number of credit hours required in both education and academic courses. Most states require you to pass teaching examinations before licensing you to teach.

Some states initially grant provisional certification and expect candidates to undertake a paid internship, working with a master teacher in a school for at least a year.

Are There Other Ways to Become Certified?

If enough certified teachers are not available, most states will issue emergency credentials to college graduates who want to teach but who have not met the state's minimum requirements for regular credentials. Some states also offer alternative teacher certification to college graduates who lack teacher education training but have some experience in subject areas where teachers are needed. Provisional certificates have been offered to compensate for this shortage, and these teachers are given a specified time to complete requirements.

Where Can I Find Information on Various State Requirements?

The most reliable information source is each state's education department or licensing office. The addresses are listed in *Requirements for Certification*, an annual publication of the University of Chicago Press. Another source is the *Manual on Certification and Preparation of Educational Personnel in the United States* published by the National Association of State Directors of Teacher Education and Certification (NASDTEC).

Are There National Teaching Requirements?

There are no national teaching requirements, but nationwide teaching standards may soon be implemented. The National Board for Professional Teaching Standards is developing a system that will grant national certification to those who voluntarily attempt and pass a set of standardized examinations. It is possible that states may eventually adopt these national standards.

If I Meet the Requirements in One State, Can I Teach in Another?

As of 1991, 31 states plus the District of Columbia have an agreement that permits certification reciprocity. However, teachers might not transfer into a new jurisdiction at the same salary level and will probably need to take some additional courses.

How Do I Locate Jobs?

At present there is no centralized national job listing. States and/or districts advertise for and recruit their own teachers; you must contact them individually.

What Is the Demand for Teachers?

There is turnover in the teaching force just as there is in other professions. New teachers will always be needed, but this may vary according to subject speciality and geographic location. An increased demand for more secondary teachers is developing, particularly in mathematics, science, special education, and English as a second language. There is also an overall need for more minority teachers. Shortages of teachers may occur in rural and urban schools.

References

References identified with an ED number (documents) have been abstracted and are in the ERIC database. Documents are available in ERIC microfiche collections at more than 700 locations. Documents can also be ordered through the ERIC Document Reproduction Service: (800) 433-ERIC. For more information, contact the ERIC Clearinghouse on Teacher Education, One Dupont Circle, NW, Suite 610, Washington, DC 20036; (202) 293-2450.

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